

# Pleasant Grove Junior High School 810 North 100 East Pleasant Grove, Utah 84062

February 20-21, 2007



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

# THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

# **Pleasant Grove Junior High School**

810 North 100 East Pleasant Grove, Utah 84062

February 20-21, 2007

#### **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, February 20-21, 2007, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Pleasant Grove Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Blaine Edman is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Pleasant Grove Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Pleasant Grove Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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# PLEASANT GROVE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

# ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

# **School Administration**

Blaine Edman  Matt Norman  Elizabeth Wilson		Assistant Principal			
Counseling					
Derek Guinn		Counselor			
Support Staff					
Steve Bezzant  K'Ann Carlson  Laurie Danklef  Paul Garland  Delayne Gray  Kathy Larsen  Annette Mills  Cyndy Reyes  Kathy Taylor		Custodian Finance Secretary Copy Room Custodian Front Office Receptionist Counseling Secretary Registrar Attendance Secretary Campus Aide			
<b>Faculty</b>					
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Danielle Losee

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## PLEASANT GROVE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

We strive to inspire students to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens.

#### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

Students need to demonstrate their understanding of essential knowledge and skills, be actively involved in solving problems, and produce quality work.

Students learn best when actively engaged in the learning process through curriculum and instructional practices that involve them in a variety of learning activities and assessments.

A student's self-esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among students and staff.

Teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, and the community share responsibility for advancing the school's mission.

### MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Lori Gardner, Park City School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Thayne Hutchinson, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan School District

Marvin Lowe, School, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan School District

Paul Reynolds, Hillcrest Junior High School, Murray School District

Mary Anne Stevens, Hunter Junior High School, Granite School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

#### PLEASANT GROVE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Pleasant Grove Junior High is located in Pleasant Grove, Utah. It currently serves 1,298 students in grades 7-9. The school serves almost half the students in Pleasant Grove. Due to the stability of the community, many of the parents and staff members of the school are alumni of the school. The facility was built in 1976 with several subsequent additions, the most recent completed in 2004. Ninety-five percent of the students are Caucasian. The largest minority group is Hispanic, which has doubled from three percent to six percent in the past seven years. Approximately 30 percent of the students receive qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a number which has remained static for the past four years.

Like all Alpine District junior high and middle schools, Pleasant Grove Junior High School operates on the productivity model. Most teachers teach every period, with no preparation period built into the school day. Teachers are given extra compensation and are thus are the highest paid teachers in the district, resulting in less turnover than might be experienced in middle level schools elsewhere in the state.

Pleasant Grove Junior High is valued in the community, and parental support is strong. The school maintains positive relationships with area colleges and universities and businesses.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The school did a thorough examination of standardized testing data. The data defined the success rates from 2004 through 2006. In an effort to compare CRT scores for one group of students over the span of three years, the school presented a value-added comparison. This provided valuable information on student achievement that was further disaggregated to examine the performance based on gender, ethnicity, special education, and low income. The conclusion drawn was that students are performing on average with peers of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Students score slightly above state averages and slightly below district averages

The school has also done considerable work examining academic performance. In the fall of 2004, the administration and faculty adopted the motto, "Failure is not an option." To this end, academic performance as measured by student grades is routinely assessed. Year 2004-2005 data serves as the baseline, with indications that there is a dramatic reduction in the number of students with failing grades.

The final set of data was a survey given two or three years ago. Generally, students, parents, and teachers gave positive marks, with sentiments regarding the administration and counseling staff very positive from all groups.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team commends the school for the depth of investigation and the analysis given to standardized test scores. However, the information presented provides a narrow view of the school's accomplishments. To fully understand the extent to which students are experiencing academic achievement, and to fully inform school decisions, the Visiting Team recommends that the school expand its profile to include indicators of success such as attendance information and behavioral information; data gleaned from STAR testing and the Direct Writing Assessment; and conduct a survey of students, parents, and teachers focused on effective school indicators. It should be remembered that the school profile can be valuable in informing new faculty and staff, as well as parents, of the efforts made and their effect on student achievement.

### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Expand student achievement data to more broadly define student success.
   Consideration should be given to how student learning could be measured beyond standardized testing and academic grades.
- Behavioral data needs to be presented. This should include information on attendance, tardies, behavioral referrals, safe school information, etc.
- Programs such as reading classes and guided studies should be evaluated, and data published, to assess effectiveness.
- As the faculty and staff implement their desired results for student learning, indicators of success will need to be developed and results incorporated into the School Profile.

#### **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The school community has not been engaged in an accreditation process for at least 10 years. The school started the process by taking its Professional

Development Team through the USOE Leadership Training. Assistant Principal Matt Norman was delegated the task of overseeing the work. A Steering Committee was composed, with representation from each department. Monday collaboration time was used for the dissemination of information and discussion of progress, occurring mostly within the context of departments but also occasionally in whole-faculty meetings. The school's Community Council and PTSA Board were also provided with regular updates on the process and opportunity to participate on focus groups.

The administration was responsible for the generation of data used for the profile. This information was shared with stakeholders. Elements of discussion were brought back to the Steering Committee for further consideration and refinement throughout the process.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The Visiting Team found that elements of the self-study did a thorough job of defining strengths and limitations. The information provided in the school profile, while only defining one aspect of student achievement, is of value in that it provides an excellent summary of standardized testing data. It is clear that some departments spent considerable time on the self-study. The Visiting Team is confident that with further collaborative work on continuous improvement, the self-study will be elaborated upon and become more meaningful and of greater use to the school community.

# CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Pleasant Grove Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

- 1. **Lifelong Learning:** A lifelong learner has gained basic knowledge and developed the individual learning skills that support continuous education, encourage effective participation in a democratic society and maximize employment opportunities.
- 2. **Effective Communication:** An effective communicator successfully interacts with others using a variety of mediums, e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, painting, singing, playing instruments, dancing, dramatizing, and sculpting.
- 3. Responsible Citizenship and Character Development: A responsible citizen participates in the local and world communities to promote personal and public good. Students will develop personal attributes that will contribute to a better world.

## Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

Pleasant Grove Junior High School has employed a collaborative process for crafting and articulating a viable vision for the school that is defined in the mission statement. The mission statement articulates a school-wide vision in a compelling and concise manner.

The Visiting Team commends the parents, teachers, staff, students, and community members of Pleasant Grove Junior High School for working together to develop a mission statement that reflects a common direction of the school. The Visiting Team also commends the school for having the Community Council ratify the completed goals, mission statement, and beliefs.

The mission statement, goals, and beliefs have been communicated with all members of the school community through newsletters, student handbooks, parent/teacher meetings, student-led conferences, and posters around the school and in every classroom. The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to make specific and general efforts to promote the mission, beliefs, and goals of the school to help all members embrace a common vision.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

The Visiting Team commends stakeholders of Pleasant Grove Junior High School for defining a common set of beliefs that support, align with, and promote the mission and vision of the school. Administrators, teachers, and staff members have created the motto "Failure is not an option" to make the beliefs come alive. A tremendous amount of work has been done to identify failing students and help direct them to interventions with the first hour teacher, lunch labs, after-school activities, and other interventions. The Visiting Team recommends that the school take steps to ensure that "best practices" and excellence in teaching and learning are present in each classroom as a primary intervention. This primary intervention could catch many students before they need the extra help outside the classroom.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

Pleasant Grove Junior High School's DRSLs are based on the school's priorities for improving student learning and instructional and organizational effectiveness. The Visiting Team found evidence that some teachers were constructing activities

based on the DRSLs. The Visiting Team commends the school for its initial efforts to embed the DRSLs into everyday instruction.

The school has implemented the Viking Values Program, which provides a defined set of criteria for student achievement of each DRSL. This program specifically emphasizes the Responsible Citizenship and Character Development DRSL. The program is being implemented through a variety of different methods, including character education lessons, Viking Club for good attendance, GPA activities, and the dissemination of Viking Bucks. Each method seeks to reinforce a broad array of positive achievements and behaviors among students.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue the development of Walk Aways (standards-based assessments) and use them to assess what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each class period. The Walk Aways should address intended learner outcomes and the school-wide DRSLs.

Additionally, the school should develop methods and tools (rubrics) to assess student achievement of each DRSL. The Visiting Team recommends that time be given in the context of interdisciplinary or whole-faculty meetings to develop means of measuring the DRSLs that would translate across departments.

## **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The development of the curriculum is based in part on established standards for student learning. Essential knowledge and skills in most content areas are identified and are usually given priority in the development of the curriculum. The plan for supporting the implementation of the curriculum is not fully developed. Efforts are made to coordinate the curriculum within departments, with limited effort to coordinate across the curriculum areas. Department meetings are held weekly to discuss and design common assessments based on the Utah State Core Curriculum.

The Visiting Team commends the efforts of individual departments to collaborate and develop common assessments, and recommends continued efforts on the part of departments to collaborate and identify a balanced and comprehensive set of essential knowledge and skills in each content area. The Visiting Team also recommends that alignment occur between what and how something is taught and what are to be the intended learning outcomes. The outcome of this collaboration needs to include periodic evaluations of the curriculum and a limited review of student performance data.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

Departmental teams in the school meet regularly in professional learning communities to align curricula and develop assessments to assist students in attaining the desired results for student learning. The school is currently investigating methods that involve the collaborative work across departments to provide a more cross-curricular approach and focus on the school's desired results for student learning.

The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts to design professional development opportunities that involve designing curriculum standards that align with the school's desired results for student learning. The Visiting Team recommends that these efforts be shared with all teachers, and that collaboration be expanded across all content areas to ensure the inclusion of the desired results for student learning, including a scheduled opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the content area's methods of addressing these standards.

### **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

The design and selection of instructional strategies and learning activities are based on the essential knowledge and skills for student learning. In some departments, there are limited opportunities for students to apply their learning in meaningful, real-life contexts or participate in thought-provoking learning activities, while in other departments, opportunities for such learning are more frequent. The Visiting Team commends the teachers in the elective classes for bringing in ideas and projects that get students involved in their learning.

Students recommended that teachers employ more project activities and experimental/problem-solving activities to make the learning more enjoyable. During the course of the visit, the Visiting Team saw evidence of a preponderance of learning activities that engaged students on the lower tiers of the hierarchy of learning—knowledge, understanding, and application. In some classes the activities contributed to problems with behavior, and students were disengaged from learning. Especially as the school is moving to a block schedule, it will be imperative that the faculty engage in a comprehensive study of research-based best practices that can improve instructional time and student engagement. The Visiting Team recommends that teachers study the impact of instructional methods on student success and academic achievement.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

The Visiting Team did not see much evidence of differentiation within the regular classroom. Resource students are provided with services in co-taught and specialized classes, and there are honors classes, but in some cases the instruction, expectations, and assessments were the same for all students. Pleasant Grove Junior High is working on creating a positive learning climate and expecting students to succeed by using their "Failure is not an option" motto. The emphasis placed on students' achievement has resulted in the extension of deadlines in many cases, and in the development of programs for interventions, but concern was expressed to the Visiting Team that it has not necessarily affected instruction. While many classes are employing cooperative learning, projects, and other interactive, real-life activities to help students learn the standards they teach, in some cases activities are not structured adequately to minimize disruption.

The Visiting Team commends Pleasant Grove Junior High for its efforts at departmental collaboration and the development of common assessments. The Visiting Team recommends that, as assessments are developed, attention also be given to how teachers will teach concepts for understanding. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty collaborate interdepartmentally on teaching strategies that can help diverse learners. The Visiting Team recommends that tools such as UTIPS and performance-based assessments be used to review with students any concepts that a large portion of the class is not learning. This may require research into other methods of instruction to help students understand these missed concepts.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

Students are provided with a variety of opportunities on a consistent basis to receive additional assistance to improve their learning. Students are able to attend lunch labs and after school labs, and earn Viking Bucks. The Visiting Team commends the counselors for employing beneficial support groups for students who are struggling with academics, character building, and home life. The students feel that there is an adult at the school whom they can talk to if they have a problem. The advisory time is a good support for most of the students in the school. Some parents would like to see students whose grades are declining receive guidance during the advisory time, even if their student is not yet failing. Some students have expressed a desire to have more activities after school, such as intramural sports. Others would like to see more courses offered in computer applications (multimedia) and dance.

#### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

Expectations for student achievement and performance standards are not fully developed. In classes and content areas where expectations of student learning are clearly defined, assessments of student learning are aligned with the essential knowledge and skills and performance standards for student learning. Core content areas and career and technical education have state-articulated curricula that define methods of assessment. Expectations for student achievement and performance standards are being addressed through departmental teams. Several school-wide interventions, such as lunch labs, after-school labs, and advisory classes have been implemented to address the issue of students failing one or more classes.

The Visiting Team commends the departments on their efforts to design and implement consistent assessments that incorporate State Core Curriculum standards. The Visiting Team recommends that the professional development opportunities incorporate training on assessment development, including the use of a wide variety of assessment procedures and methods to assess student learning across the content areas.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

The school has, in many cases, defined the purpose of the assessments of student learning but not consistently communicated the purpose to the stakeholders prior to the assessment. Most assessments are directly linked to the specific content being presented to promote student achievement and improved learning. The selection of the method of assessing student learning is not consistently based on the type of learning to be assessed, the specific performance standards for evaluating student achievement, or the purpose of the assessment.

The Visiting Team commends Pleasant Grove Junior High on its efforts to broaden the range of assessments to be used. Several departmental teams are working together to develop these consistent assessment tools. The Visiting Team recommends further training on assessment and evaluation. Departments are encouraged to address the need for common tools to assess student learning, and to continue to explore using a variety of methods of evaluating student work.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The Pleasant Grove Junior High School faculty is continuing to address issues concerning assessment methods. Assessments that are aligned across content

areas according to state and national standards decrease the possibility of inequity and bias. Most assessments are directly linked to specific instructional uses that promote students' achievement and continuous improvement in their learning.

The Visiting Team commends pleasant Grove Junior High School on its efforts to standardize assessments according to Utah State Core Curriculum. Several departments meet regularly to discuss and design such assessments. The Visiting Team recommends that the school increase its efforts to use professional development opportunities to expand the work on assessment to involve all content areas. Teachers are encouraged to expand their use of assessments and develop a variety of different procedures to evaluate student learning, and to use the data collected from these assessments to guide classroom instruction.

### **Leadership for School Improvement:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The administration clearly promotes the importance of teaching and learning. The principal has been instrumental in the development of "Failure is not an option" as an overriding philosophy in the school. Teachers feel supported in their efforts and their work, and the successes of students are routinely celebrated.

The Visiting Team found that the leadership seeks to promote professional growth by providing learning opportunities that are differentiated and relevant to the work of teachers. The district has instituted an early release schedule to provide time weekly for collaboration and the development of professional learning communities. This has been a positive force in changing the school culture to one that is more collaborative and collegial.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision-making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The school leadership uses data to drive program development, implementation, and assessment. The cohesive effort to address failing rates is facilitated with the regular use of data. Data is not only used by teachers, counselors, and administrators, but is also provided regularly to students and parents, particularly if students are at risk for failure.

The school leadership works to inform instructional practice with current research. Some teachers have been engaging in book studies according to their interests for the past year. Teachers are encouraged to share what they learn individually in their professional learning communities. Opportunities are provided for faculty members to attend workshops and conferences.

The Visiting Team commends the leadership for its commitment to fostering and supporting the professional growth of the faculty. The Visiting Team recommends that the school professional development committee look at balancing professional learning between what individuals need and want and what the collective faculty needs to be doing to bring about sustained growth and improvement.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The school leadership is doing an excellent job of monitoring student achievement in an effort to foster success. This data has been the basis for the implementation of specialized programs such as Guided Studies, Read 180, and PLATO. It has also provided the impetus for changes in the advisory program, where teachers are now focused on informing and guiding those students at risk of academic failure. Data is routinely used in the departmental professional learning communities as they develop consistent assessments of student learning. The Visiting Team commends the work of the leadership and faculty thus far. As data sources expand and additional information on student learning is developed, this work will have a significant impact on the administration and faculty.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The Visiting Team found that the leadership provides effective organizational and efficient operational management. School-wide policies and procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission statement, and are designed to support student learning. The allocation and use of resources are aligned with school goals.

The Visiting Team commends the leadership for efforts made to develop a climate and culture where positive actions are supported and acknowledged. The student recognition program is having an impact on student achievement and positive behavior. Changes in staffing have made the schools more responsive and welcoming to parents. Efforts taken to seek consensus for decision-making and to honor the work of teachers have served to open lines of communication and foster a greater sense of collaboration.

Student comments suggest that a greater adult presence in some parts of the building would help with bullying and harassment; the Visiting Team observed that in some areas of the building there is little adult presence during passing periods. Students also requested that adults not ignore put-downs. Parents and students expressed a desire for advisory teachers to advise all students about progress. Both groups feel that sometimes, between the efforts to help struggling

students and the recognition given to high-achieving students, those in the middle get missed. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty and staff consider these suggestions and recommendations as they refine their action plan.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

The allocation and use of resources at Pleasant Grove Junior High are aligned with the school goals and the action plan. The Visiting Team is confident that, as the school refines the DRSLs and action plan to more clearly define goals and objectives, allocations will be given to support implementation and assessment. The Visiting Team recommends that resources, in terms of time and funding for professional development, be focused on developing whole-faculty understanding of issues, as well as a consensus and commitment that transcends departmentalization to the effort needed to effectively implement the action plan.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

Principal Blaine Edman has done an outstanding job of eliciting the support and involvement of parents as members of the PTSA and School Community Council. The School Community Council was directly involved in the accreditation process, with several parents serving on focus groups and the council approving the mission, DRSLs, and action plan. Parents are provided with regular information through the school newsletters and website.

Faculty and staff members are provided with leadership opportunities through involvement in the Leadership Team, Professional Development Committee, and Steering Committee for accreditation. The district provides support for shared decision-making through funding for professional development facilitators in the school. These teachers work with a committee of teachers and administrators to design professional learning to support continuous improvement.

The development of professional learning communities within departments has done a great deal to encourage a sense of shared responsibility for student learning, and the administrative support and guidance given to this work has helped to mitigate conflict and promote positive action.

Mr. Edman is noted for his regard of consensus as a means of decision-making, and works hard to ensure that people have the information and resources they need to create change. The Visiting Team commends him for his leadership and guidance of the school's improvement efforts.

### **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

Pleasant Grove Junior High School has worked hard to support the community through positive working relationships among students, parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators. The school's dedication to creating a supporting and learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging is evident in every facet of the school.

The school has selected three elements of community building on which to concentrate: communication, nurturing, and collaboration.

In the area of communication, the school uses the PowerSchool grading program, e-mail, quarterly newsletters, the school marquee, a combination of teacher-led and student-led parent-teacher conferences, school and teacher web pages, focus groups, the PTSA, and the Community Council. The school is aware of the need to instruct parents in the use of the communication tools, and is currently working on improving student and parent web page-based communication skills.

Nurturing is fostered by making a special effort to provide a positive experience during the first day of school for seventh graders. Several student reward systems are in place to encourage positive communication among students, teachers, and administrators.

Effective collaboration is valued by the administrators and staff. Last year the school started a department-based collaboration time with an early release for students each Monday. This has been very successful for them, and is allowing a greater degree of cooperation in designing the curriculum and assessments in the various departments to better match the State Core Curriculum.

Students reported that while there appears to be little divisiveness among groups, and the adults are quick to address issues of bullying, teasing, and swearing when these issues become evident to them, frequently these behaviors happen when no adults are present. The students recommend that teachers be in the hall during class passing time.

The school is using first hour advisory time to remind students who are struggling academically to be proactive and find out what they need to do to bring up their grade(s).

The Visiting Team shares the following recommendations:

1. Parents would prefer that all students—not just the failing students—be given a "grade reality check" during the first hour advisory time.

- 2. Parents would like to be able to go to a teacher web page and see what the class is projected to do in class and daily assignments one week in advance.
- 3. Students really like Viking Bucks, but voiced the opinion that Viking Bucks should be more available (or at least distributed by more teachers) and have a larger selection of prizes.
- 4. The students recommended that teachers be in the halls during class passing time.
- b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

The administration and staff of Pleasant Grove Junior High actively engage parents and families as partners in the learning process through a variety of programs, resources, and instructional materials.

Outreach opportunities are created through community partnerships, links with higher education, networks with companies, local government, and other service-oriented organizations. Parents expressed appreciation for the PowerSchool system and for teachers working to keep its information current.

The school is used as a community center for recreational activities, athletics, voting, community classes, and caucus meetings.

## **<u>Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:</u>**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

Mr. Edman believes that professional development and collaboration are critical to the school improvement process. The means through which teachers are engaged in assessing their practice, through involvement in professional learning communities, has done much to open lines of communication. The opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development based on their own interests and needs have been utilized by most teachers. The impact, however, does not extend system-wide, leading to some disparity of understanding of what must be done collectively to address teaching and learning.

The Visiting Team recommends that, as valuable as the departmental meetings have been, time be given regularly to whole-group work. Extending the work of Six Traits of Writing training and developing a common understanding of effective instructional practices and assessments could have a significant impact on student achievement.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

Pleasant Grove Junior High's culture invites stakeholders to become actively involved in the reform process. The work of the Leadership Team, Professional Development Committee, and School Community Council is of value, and regularly affects school improvement.

It is acknowledged that the productivity schedule has a significant effect on the ability of the faculty to find time to engage in collaboration. Weekly release time of one hour has been established to offset this, but it is not enough for teachers to work in departments, across grade levels, and as a whole faculty. The school leadership is cognizant of the tension that might arise from trying to do too much. It is anticipated that, with the adoption of the block schedule and planning time every other day, the purpose of weekly release time will be reevaluated.

The Visiting Team recommends that, in an effort to promote continuous improvement, the work of focus groups continue in abridged capacity to assess changes.

# CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

#### CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

After thorough analysis of the accreditation process results and assessment of current school improvement efforts, the Steering Committee began to develop the Pleasant Grove Junior High's action plan. This six-year plan for student achievement focuses on character education, teacher collaboration, and interventions for students. Many of the action steps defined in the plan have been initiated within the last year or two.

The plan's areas of focus clearly address the critical areas of need in the school. The areas of focus have been linked to the school's defined DRSLs, and it will be important, as the work progresses, that the school develop means of measuring the effect of actions on the DRSLs. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty

narrow the focus of the plan by developing rubrics that define the DRSLs and then using them as one means of assessing the effectiveness of the action plan.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The action plan was created with the help and support of the entire faculty and the School Community Council. The Steering Committee spent a considerable amount of time inviting input for the plan as it was written and revised. Information was provided to faculty members and parents. The School Community Council approved the plan.

Since steps in all three focus areas of the plan have been implemented, the school community has seen positive changes. This has gendered increased commitment to school improvement efforts.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school wide action plan appear to be?

The school will need to refine its ideas about what exactly it seeks to accomplish through its action plan by clarifying the DRSLs and then determining the types of data needed to assess progress. Until that is done, it will be difficult to measure progress.

The Visiting Team found that, while the attention given to increasing collaboration within departments is producing positive results, it also lends to a fragmented view of school improvement. Some departments wrote their own mission statements and action plans. As has been recommended before, it is critical that steps be taken to construct a whole-faculty view of what should be happening for students, and a collective commitment to the work. Students, particularly young adolescents, need learning experiences that are integrated. They need consistent messages about behavior, and in order to be successful, their diverse learning needs must be addressed through effective instructional techniques. For the action plan to be successful, people will need to be "on the same page" regarding what works for students.

# CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

#### **Commendations:**

• The Visiting Team commends the dedication of the administration and staff. It is clearly evident that the staff, faculty, and administration care about their students and seek to provide a quality education.

- The Visiting Team commends the work that has been taking place to develop professional learning communities within the departments, which has had a significant impact on the culture and climate of the school. Collaboration has increased, along with an increased interest in quality professional development.
- The Visiting Team commends the examination of academic performance and the efforts to address the failure rates through the implementation of levels of intervention, which have promoted student success. It is clear that parents and students recognize and appreciate the efforts by the administration, faculty, and staff to make sure that fewer students "fall through the cracks."

### **Recommendations:**

- School-wide change will depend on school-wide approaches. The Visiting Team recommends that the professional development plan incorporate individual and whole-group learning that is sustained throughout the year. As the school moves to a block schedule, it will be important that high quality professional development become job-embedded through the use of weekly release time. Time for all teachers to receive the same information, dialogue, and practice in departmental and interdepartmental groups, then share what they have done with the learning in their teaching, will be necessary as teachers change practice to meet the needs of students.
- As Pleasant Grove Junior High continues the work of curbing failure rates, it will be important to delve into the correct correlation between effective instruction and formative assessments. The Visiting Team recommends that this work be considered the primary intervention, as it will have positive impact on more students. Interventions such as Guided Studies will have only a temporary effect if the diverse needs of students are not met in the regular classroom.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the DRSLs be clarified through the development of a means of assessing student progress. It is to be anticipated that, in a review of the progress of the school's action plan, intended learner outcomes for the DRSLs will be defined (i.e., the indicators of an effective communicator, and how progress is measured and communicated).
- The Visiting Team recommends that the needs of young adolescents and effective research-based components of middle-level programs and practices be central to learning, discussion, and planning.